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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [MK](#) [BU](#) [NL](#)

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: LESSONS LEARNED FROM NATO ADVISORY TEAM
SNAFU

Classified By: Ambassador Reeker for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The assignment of Bulgarians to both the commander and deputy positions of the NATO Advisory Team for Macedonia is not in U.S. interests. End summary.

¶2. (C) We learned off-line in early June that Bulgaria was the only Ally who volunteered to fill the "Chief NAT" position in Skopje, i.e., the deputy position at the NATO Advisory Team for Macedonia. As we understood it, the plan had been for the former Dutch DATT to take the Chief NAT position, but it appears that the Dutch government did not move precipitously to effect this. We then worked with Naples, USNATO, SHAPE, and the Dutch to turn this around, but it now appears that the Dutch DATT will almost certainly not be assigned, and the momentum remains that the next Chief NAT will be a Bulgarian. A Bulgarian, Commodore Valentin Gagashev, already holds the NAT Commander slot.

¶3. (C) The negative consequences for NATO's engagement in Macedonia could be significant. Bulgaria and Macedonia are wary neighbors at best. Part of the larger Macedonian region became part of Bulgaria as a consequence of the Balkan Wars, and Bulgarian fascists occupied present-day Macedonia during World War II. To this day, there are elements in Bulgaria who consider the modern state of Macedonia as a historical mistake, and many Bulgarians do not recognize the Macedonian language as separate from their own. While a number of Macedonians work in Bulgaria and hold Bulgarian passports as a matter of convenience, we should not mistake this for deep affection. We have unsubstantiated reports that elements in the Bulgarian embassy here are working closely with Greek colleagues on activities that are not in our interests.

¶4. (C) Regardless of the intentions of the new Chief NAT, it makes no sense from a NATO perspective that the commander and chief would come from the same country, especially a neighbor, and especially a country so new to the Alliance. Macedonia, and our interests here, would be far better served -- as in the past -- by a NAT leadership steeped in NATO experience from established Allies with no "negative baggage" here (such as Greece). Macedonia needs advisors in the NAT who have established relationships within NATO and know how to manage the unique bureaucracy at SHAPE. This is why the Dutch DATT was the ideal choice. When CHOD LTG Stojanovski learned that the new Chief NAT would be from Bulgaria, he was incensed and called SHAPE immediately. His response should have been predictable: many Macedonians do not trust Bulgaria. Thus the assignment of Bulgarians to run the NAT calls into question NATO's commitment to Macedonia, especially since a number of Macedonian military contacts had told us that they viewed the assignment of the Dutch DATT as a signal of NATO's commitment to again send its "A-team" here.

¶5. (C) The new NAT commander, Commodore Gagashev, is by all accounts a professional and working in good faith. While we understand he privately believes it would be a mistake for his deputy to also be a Bulgarian, he cannot force the issue within his national command structure. While it is likely

too late for the Dutch DATT to be assigned to this position,
we would ask that Washington, USNATO, and Embassy Sofia work
to issue to ensure a better outcome for U.S. and NATO
interests in Macedonia.

REEKER